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PROGRAM 60 Minutes

STATION WDVM-TV
CBS Network

DATE March 27, 1983 7:00 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Soviet Gas Pipeline

ED BRADLEY: President Reagan recently fought a bitter battle with the European allies over the new gas pipeline the Soviets are building to Europe. The Europeans wanted the Soviet gas. Reagan didn't want them to have it. Now some Europeans, especially West Germans, are having second thoughts, themselves, because they believe that the Soviets are using forced labor from the Gulag, that network of prisons and labor camps administered by the KGB, to build the pipeline.

This is where the pipeline begins, in the frozen wastes of Western Siberia. Ten years ago, when the West was reeling from the oil embargo and energy crisis, the Soviets hit the jackpot here in the Orenburg region. They discovered the largest natural gas reserves in the world.

Since then, the network of pipelines out of Orenburg has been expanding. Now, in what they call the deal of the century, the Soviets, in spite of President Reagan's opposition and with the help of Western technology, are building a pipeline that will earn them hard Western currency by carrying gas some 3000 miles into West Germany.

And it will come out here. This is Weidhaus (?), West Germany, just across the border from Czechoslovakia. In 1984 gas from the new Soviet pipeline will enter Germany and Western Europe through this point. West Germany is already the Soviets' biggest gas customer; and with the new pipeline, will double its consumption.

But human rights activists are now saying that West Germany should not buy the product of forced labor, should not buy what they call Gulag gas.

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DR. REINHARD GANOUCK: We see here a similar situation as existed during the Second World War when the big chemical factory I.G. Farben did employ prisoners from the concentration camps in Auschwitz for production of chemical, whatever, products.

BRADLEY: Dr. Reinhard Ganouck is the President of the International Society for Human Rights in Frankfurt.

DR. GANOUCK: This activities, using prisoners of concentration camps for forced labor, was termed a crime against humanity. And Albert Speer, who was a Minister of Industries, or whatever, got 20 years in prison for that.

Who in Europe is going to be the next Albert Speer?

BRADLEY: The International Society for Human Rights is an independently-financed organization which monitors human rights abuse in both right- and left-wing regimes. In its Russian Department, the evidence the society has collected from former prisoners' letters and telephone calls is sufficient, it claims, to prove that forced labor is being used on the pipeline.

Phone calls from the Soviet Union are tape-recorded. In this one, a contact from Moscow listed the names of those recently arrested for practicing their religious beliefs. She says one of them, Vladimir Maroshkin, a member of the Pentecostal Church, has been sent to work on the gas pipeline.

"Filthy lies" is what Tass, the Soviet news agency, called the allegations of forced labor.

In an effort to counter these continuing reports, Soviet authorities arranged a trip for Western reporters to get a first-hand look at conditions on the pipeline. CBS News Moscow correspondent Don McNeil went along.

DON MCNEIL: Nestled in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, the campsite where the workers live looked clean and suspiciously neat, by Russian standards.

BRADLEY: The site chosen for the visit by the Soviets was at the southern end of the pipeline, a long way from Siberia. No signs of forced labor were visible.

DR. GANOUCK: I would say that to conclude that Western journalists did not see any prisoners there, to draw the conclusion that the prisoners do not exist, that would just be like, from the prisoners' side, because they never saw in concentration camps any Western journalists, to conclude that Western journalists do not exist.

I would conclude they exist in different places.

BRADLEY: That forced labor exists in some places in the Soviet Union has been well-documented. This film, shot secretly in 1976 by Soviet dissidents, shows a labor camp in Soviet Latvia. Closely-guarded trucks ferry prisoners from a camp to a construction site where they are building a factory.

How many prisoners are there in all? Estimates range as high as seven million.

Professor Mikhail Vaslensky, an historian, was an adviser to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party before he defected to the West.

Could they build that pipeline without forced labor?

PROFESSOR MIKHAIL VASLENSKY: Yes, they can. I am sure they can. But only it is cheaper with the forced labor. With forced labor, it costs them nothing at all.

BRADLEY: According to Vaslensky, the use of forced labor is not an abuse of power by the Soviet regime. It is a fundamental part of the Soviet prison system.

PROFESSOR VASLENSKY: The penal law introduces not only, as usually, as normal, the prisons, but the camps. And 99 percent of prisoners are in the camps. And all these camps are just the sites of forced labor.

BRADLEY: Mahmed Kumagambetov, a native of Soviet Asia, questioned his country's political system, and it cost him 17 years of his life, first in prison, then a labor camp, and finally exile in Siberia. He now lives in Munich, where he met his wife Natalie, a Russian by birth, who grew up in the United States.

MAHMED KUMAGAMBETOV: First I worked on gas pipeline in Meginon.

BRADLEY: He showed us where he worked on several pipelines in Siberia.

KUMAGAMBETOV: After that, I worked in Surgut. [Speaks in Russian]

MRS. KUMAGAMBETOV: On a concrete construction plant. In that plant, there worked 960 prisoners under strict regime. Close to that plant there was a camp where the prisoners lived. And every morning, all day long, they were being shuttled back and forth from the plant to the camp and back again.

BRADLEY: Mahmed Kumagambetov now works for the U.S. Government-funded Radio Liberty, broadcasting to his homeland of Kazakhstan. He says he saw forced labor being used on the Soviet pipelines until he came to the West in 1979.

But what about the pipeline being built right now?

MRS. KUMAGAMBETOV [translating]: The pipeline which is being built right now does go thorough Surgut. And at that time, there was already work being performed in Surgut. It all belongs to one large gas pipeline system. And there is nothing to the contrary. There is nothing to say that they have introduced a law that forced labor is not to be used.

BRADLEY: In 1981, when work started on the new gas pipeline to Europe, the late President Leonid Brezhnev appealed for 400,000 workers to go to Siberia. These pipeline volunteers -- when Soviet television made this film they were called "Brave Pioneers" -- were in short supply, even when they were offered three times more than they could earn back in Moscow.

So, have the Soviets been using forced labor on this new pipeline? According to Albina Yakarava, they have.

Albina Yakarava now lives in Munich with her two children. Her husband is in a labor camp in the Soviet Union. She was the founding member of an organization named SMUT (?), a trade union movement banned by the Soviet authorities.

Last May in Leningrad, she says, she met three men who told her that during the winter of 1981 and '82 they had been forced to work on the gas pipeline.

We talked with her through an interpreter.

BRADLEY: Where are we talking about here?

She says her contacts told her they were organized into brigades of around 30 or 40 near the towns of Tumin and Surgut in Western Siberia. They then often worked as much as 600 miles away in any direction.

TRANSLATOR: I do know about these brigades that have been formed in Tumin and Surgut. And according to what my acquaintances told me, there were many brigades that had been formed to be sent to work on the pipeline.

BRADLEY: West Germany has the largest community of Russian exiles in Europe. Some of them have been here since the Russian Revolution. And their concern for what's happening in their homeland has touched a sensitive nerve in this country

where they live because it is a reminder of the past. And in Germany, the past is not a pleasant memory.

Just outside Munich is Dachau. Under the Nazis, it was an infamous concentration camp and a center for forced labor. Today Dachau is kept as a public memorial, a reminder of the past. And each Sunday, as Germans visit Dachau, they must have Mikhail Makarenko (?), former Soviet political prisoner, who comes here to tell the somewhat bewildered Germans that the gas they plan to use, the gas that will come through the new Soviet pipeline, is also, he says, the product of forced labor.

For West Germans, these allegations of forced labor could not have come at a more unwelcomed time. Last month marked the 50th anniversary of Hitler's rise to power. And in this bout of national soul-searching, the Nazis' use of forced labor did not escape attention.

DR. GANOUCK: We should heat our rooms with gas which is slave gas, which is Gulag gas, as we call it, which is coming out from cooperation with a regime which is employing slave labor. We cannot accept this.

I hope you in the United States -- I think you do have laws prohibiting the import of goods which are produced in slave labor. Now, this is a true case of slave labor, and we cannot accept these goods here in Germany. I don't want to have it in my living room or my kitchen, this gas; and I hope many people feel the same.

BRADLEY: But West Germany needs to import two-thirds of all of its energy needs, and it is the major European partner in this gas deal with the Soviets. German banks have extended huge loans to the Soviet Union. German workers have new jobs building equipment for the pipeline.

This month's general elections kept the incumbents in power. And it seems likely that the interests of German workers will continue to be of more concern than the welfare of Soviet workers.